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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000784

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI PARLIAMENT OPENS FALL SESSION

REF: BAKU 742 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: ACTING POL/ECON COUNSELOR SHANNON ROSS, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (U) SUMMARY: On September 30 parliament opened its fall session. Pro-government MPs congratulated themselves on opening a large new office building. Opposition MPs complained about the arrest of youth activist bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade (reftel), and the opposition's lack of information on Turkey-Armenia rapprochement. Vice-Speaker Ziyafat Asgarov replied that Turkey would never agree to something that violated the interests of Azerbaijan. Asgarov said that the blogger investigation and trial were still ongoing. Opposition MPs put forward a number of proposals for new laws for the fall work plan. Ruling party MP Ali Ahmadov replied with a stinging speech attacking the opposition as not being supported by the people. While little substantial work was done at the session, it highlighted several key dynamics of Azerbaijani politics * all decisions are made behind closed doors and without the participation of the few remaining opposition politicians. END SUMMARY.

SPEAKER OPENS SESSION WITH SELF-CONGRATULATION

12. (SBU) Speaker Ogtay Asadov opened the parliament's first session by congratulating the parliament on the opening of a new office building, which will contain a library and an office for each MP (previously MPs sat two to an office). Roll was then taken showing that 104 of the 124 MPs were present (first lady and MP Mehriban Aliyeva was not present * she is rarely if ever seen in her seat). During the open debate that followed, several ruling party MPs congratulated the speaker on his hard work on the new building, and on the general greatness of the parliament and the president.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS COMPLAIN

13. (SBU) In comparison, several opposition party MPs put forward complaints. Jamil Hasanli of the Popular Front Party stated that parliament should be more open to the press in its last year in office. He also raised the issue of jailed youth activists and bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, stating that they were arrested without any reason. Zahid Orujov of the Motherland Party asked for a working group to watch the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process, as Turkey is likely to take giant step when it signs the protocols with Armenia in October.

RULING PARTY RESPONDS IN KIND AND STOPS DEBATE

14. (SBU) Deputy Speaker Ziyafat Asgarov replied to the issues raised by the opposition. He assured the MPs that Turkey would never agree to something that violated the interests of Azerbaijan; and that diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia would be helpful for Azerbaijan, as Turkey could the press Armenia for a solution to NK. On the jailed youth activists, Asgarov said that the investigation and trial were still ongoing and that the court would not sentence the two without proving their guilt. He then ended the open debate, despite a long list of MPs still wishing to speak, to which Panah Huseyn of the Musavat Party loudly objected.

WORK PLAN DEBATED... AND ADOPTED WITHOUT CHANGE

15. (C) Debate then moved the parliament's work plan for the fall session. Opposition MPs used this opportunity to put forward a number of proposed laws to add to the work plan. Agazade submitted five proposals, including changes to the election code, increased responsibilities for municipalities, a revised law on political parties, a new committee to monitor the NK peace process, and revisions to the new law on education. Asgarov limited speeches to five minutes rather than the usual ten.

16. (SBU) All four MPs from the Musavat Party then spoke, claiming they had submitted 10 proposals to the parliamentary administration for inclusion in the work plan, and none of

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them were accepted. They called for reforms in the healthcare system, more rule of law, freedom of assembly, increased level of social welfare payments, cleaning up Baku, and called for the rights of the jailed youth activists to be restored. Panah Huseyn gave the last speech, stating that the opposition will run in the municipal and parliamentary elections, and they will be united, strong, and hard to defeat.

17. (SBU) Ali Ahmadov, executive secretary of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) and known for being the party's ideological enforcer, then gave a stinging rebuke to the opposition. He claimed the economy was growing and the opposition had nothing serious to complain about. He stated that the Azerbaijani people believe in YAP and President Aliyev and see no hope for the future in the opposition. He said the opposition was only blackmailing the government in order to try to survive in the political arena. Speaker Ogtay Asadov then ended debate, and the work plan was passed without changes with a vote of 100-3.

COMMENT

18. (C) While there was little important legislation passed during the opening session, the debate within parliament echoes several important political dynamics in Azerbaijan. The opposition holds few total seats and is not included in important committees, and cannot influence substantial policy changes or the work plan. They can use their seats as a bully pulpit, however, and do so often. Parliament is not open to the public, however, and the official media never prints opposition speeches, leaving the public unaware of what the opposition does. All decisions are made by the leadership before the general session begins, so even pro-GOAJ MPs can not make any changes to legislation during the session. Therefore, parliamentary sessions generally have the flavor of an echo chamber for whatever the GOAJ is attempting to do, with a few lone voices from the corner (opposition members sit in the back corner of the chamber) uselessly raising objections.

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